



Leadership and Mental Health

From 6pm on Monday 25th September until 4.00pm on Tuesday 26th

Is what we're doing really working in the way that we would want it to?

From our recent conversations with Fellows, this sacred topic is very clearly on our hearts and mind. We are all more conscious than ever about mental health as a priority for our-selves and in our leadership. We are doing what we can but there seems to be a sense that 'we are not quite getting this right'.

We have come a long way since we lived in a society that didn't understand, let alone talk about, mental health. People who experienced mental illness and their families were left in the dark, afraid that sharing their experiences could negatively impact their careers, relationships and lives.

The 1960's saw policy influencers finding voice, the 70's shifted the focus from lab to lived experience, the 80's saw early legislation, the 90's the decade of brain research, the 21st century the impact of notable people telling their stories, when science and story came together. Fast-forward to today, where nurturing and sustaining mental health is a high priority for all.

As leaders if we are to truly support people and be responsible in relation to mental health and illness, does this require us to be more introspective our-selves?

This does not necessarily mean we need to all go to therapy, however where is the gain and shift we give others by being more open to the idea?

Leaders in responsible organisations have a genuine care for people's mental health and well-being. In a proactive sense this is about, releasing the richness of mental diversity and promoting mental wellbeing in the same way as we promote physical well being, enabling us all to be the best we can be in our working lives.

On the other hand, is there a danger of 'mental health' being weaponised, where work and therefore organisations become the tipping point for blame? Where does responsibility lie? What does good really look like? What are the unintended consequences of legislation?



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In this Conversation, we will explore these questions and more, with the dignity and respect ever present in our conversations, and with the support of a mental health expert.

This Conversation will inevitably become a parallel process, where the space to reflect is given to both our own needs as a leader and those of our organisation.

Many of you say how therapeutic time at St George's House is and we hope that this remains true but, of course, this conversation is not therapy. We hope that it provides space to share and learn from each other, to explore options and pragmatic approaches to create the conditions for good mental health and for wisdom in our responses to mental ill-health.

Agenda

The Conversation will follow our usual flow in three key stages:

- **This is Me** – taking stock of where we find ourselves currently in relation to this theme and the questions that are arising from our experience
- **Tell Us More** – enquiring more deeply into our learning and insights as we probe into this experience
- **Yes I can, Yes I will** – turning wisdom and insight into intention and practice



“This is me”

Arriving in the Vicars' Hall, we will begin with sharing the particular interest each of us has in this Conversation and the questions we are bringing.

Organisations are where we humans can look for our primal needs of safety, belonging and recognition to be satisfied and yet there are many forces that we are aware threaten those and so impact our mental health, e.g. the imposter phenomenon, performativity, the hidden dynamics of boundaries, ever-changing rhythms and disciplines, job in-security, hierarchies.

In addition, we are alongside our colleagues in the course of their lives, where identities are forming, there is natural healing in response to events, life-cycle changes are taking place. All of these operate in a different time to functional organisational life.

As leaders, we often feel the weight of responsibility, at times, beyond what is really ours, in balancing the conditions for mental health and performance and navigating legislation, which can lead to us mistrusting our instincts as friend and citizen.

'This is me' provides an essential opportunity to have open, authentic conversations, both individually and strategically about what we see, the impact of what we are currently doing and leadership in this space.

As we have more of a sense of each other, in small groups we will share our own contexts and inquiry more fully,

- What I am seeing in my organisation.
- What we are doing and where I sense we are getting it right in raising awareness, prevention and response.
- Where I am sensing more is needed, or where I simply don't know what to do.
- What is troubling me?
- How I sense I and my leaders are doing.

St George's House and the Vicars' Hall is a safe space to look afresh at this, one of the most complex topics of our time. We gain insight in this sharing and are stirred to step beyond our existing practices and processes.



“Tell Us More”

This phase will begin with the sharing of overnight reflections, insights and further questions. We will draw out key common themes to explore more fully during the rest of the morning, with the help of an expert in the field.

As you would expect from a Fellow Conversation, we will support and challenge each other in gaining new insights, getting our boundaries right and looking at mental health in new ways.

Our aim will be to unlock greater clarity and confidence and create a foundation for our leadership in this area that we can trust and act upon. This will take us into the next phase...

“Yes I can!”

Over lunch, we will consolidate our insights and start to frame these in terms of clear intentions.

Working in 2's or 3's we will find ways to be useful to each other, ensuring our intentions are anchored in sustainable actions, energy and commitment. This begins with a committed focus on how we resource and strengthen our own mental capacity for the degree of stretch we are in.

We will take stock of the learning that has arisen and find sustainable practices that serve us as we step back into our busy, pressurised environments, full of distractions and distortions. In these small groups, we will clarify what is useful for our organisations and how that may be introduced as an evolutionary step in prevention of and support for mental health in our work-places.

We will close the Conversation with a pause to look back and 'hoover up' all the wisdom that has been gleaned and shared – particularly the very practical wisdom, the little tips, practices and insights that emerge spontaneously, often in offline chats, as we talk and share experiences together.



Timings: Monday 25th September

1430	You are welcome to check in to your room in St George's House
1630	Tea in the House for those joining Evensong in the Chapel
1705	Evensong (<i>optional</i>)
1750	Vicars' Hall. Refreshments, then start of the Conversation at 6.00pm. Introduction to the Guiding Principles and then on to Stage One: <i>This is me!</i> We work in small groups sharing our stories and experiences
1945	Working dinner in the House Dining Room
2115	We go back to the Sitting Room for tea/coffee, and after dinner drinks
2145	Private floodlit tour of St George's Chapel, departing the Sitting Room (<i>optional</i>).

Tuesday 26th September

0745	Breakfast is served in St George's House. Please clear your personal belongings from your room and bring them down to the Vicars' Hall, so that the domestic staff can prepare the rooms for the next group
0845	We start again promptly in the Vicars' Hall with a reflection on what is emerging for us. At roughly 10.00am we move on to Stage 2: <i>Tell us more</i> . We move in and out of small groups as we identify specific aspects and challenges in our different situations that require more focused attention and quality thinking time. We capture key insights and take-aways as we go and at around 12.30 start preparing for Stage 3: <i>Yes I can!</i>



Tuesday 26th September cont...

1245 A hot buffet lunch is served in the Vicars' Hall and we work together in our groups, reflecting on how our insights from the morning are speaking to us and our intentions as leaders. At 1.40 we have a team photo on the West steps of the Chapel (weather permitting!)

1345 Back together as one group, we draw out our lunchtime reflections and engage in our final round of small group work as we clarify and solidify our intentions. At around 3pm we invite each of you to work in pairs over refreshments to sharpen up your personal resolves and commitments, after which we come back together as a whole group to close the Conversation, finishing promptly at 4.00pm.

1600 Close of Conversation and departures

Video link-up:

In the final minutes of the Conversation we will confirm the arrangements for our follow-up zoom call to hear how much progress we have each made in taking forward our resolves.

The key to us making the best possible use of our time in this is for Fellows to post a brief Whatsapp beforehand updating the rest of us on how you have acted on your resolves, and especially which one you found the most challenging. We then take it from there!

**Suggested date and time for Zoom Follow up:
Friday 1st December, 3.00pm – 4.00pm**